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SIPDIS

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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR XXXX
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JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
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JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Israel's Jericho Operation

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that a tense 10-hour siege of the PA prison in Jericho ended Tuesday night when Ahmed Saadat, the mastermind behind the 2001 assassination of tourism minister Rehavam Zeevi, and four other Palestinians involved in Zeevi's assassination, walked out and surrendered to troops who were poised to burst in and seize them. Fuad Shubaki, the paymaster of the Karine A weapons ship, also gave himself up. The media said that the six men will be tried in Israel. "We Got Them" and "Swift and Elegant," read just two of the front-page headlines in Maariv, while Yediot opted for "The Score Is Settled" and a "Lesson For Hamas." The Jerusalem Post cited Acting PM Ehud Olmert's denial that political considerations were involved in his decision-making. The media noted that Israel's major political parties expressed support for the IDF operation, but that some politicians, especially in the Likud, were quoted as saying that Olmert was fishing for floating votes. Major media reported that during the siege of the prison, Meretz-Yahad Chairman Yossi Beilin tried to broker a deal with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas. Leading media reported that Hamas did not respond to the operation.

The media reported that the US and Britain declared that they decided to withdraw their personnel because Abbas refused repeated demands for full compliance with the terms of the deal brokered by the US in May 2002, according to which US and British agents would monitor the Jericho jail to ensure the PA does not release the six men. The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel briefed the US on its plan a short time before IDF forces reached the Jericho prison and that it kept the Americans updated on the progress of the raid. The Jerusalem Post quoted diplomatic sources as saying Tuesday that the briefings were done both through the US Embassy in Tel Aviv and the Israeli Embassy in Washington. The Jerusalem Post printed a March 8, 2006 letter to Abbas signed by Jerusalem-based diplomats US Consul General Jake Wallis and UK CG John Jenkins, in which they wrote: "The Palestinian Authority has never fully complied with basic provisions of the agreement that established the US and UK Jericho Monitoring Mission." The Consuls General wrote that their countries would have to terminate their involvement with the Jericho monitoring arrangement and withdraw their monitors with immediate effect if the PA did not "come into full compliance" with the arrangements. Major media reported that the US and UK denied any involvement in the IDF operation. Israel Radio reported that on Tuesday, Deputy State Department Spokesman J. Adam Ereli placed the responsibility for the departure of the monitors on the PA and refrained from criticizing the IDF over the Jericho operation. Ereli was quoted as saying: "We think it's important that all sides exercise restraint and calm." Yediot and The Jerusalem Post also cited Ereli's briefing.

Israel Radio reported that the UN Security Council will today consider a new proposal submitted by Qatar to condemn Israel for the Jericho operation. The text was drawn up by Qatar's UN ambassador Abdel Aziz el-Nasser, after the failure of an attempt last night by Qatar to obtain a presidential declaration condemning Israel. In the new text, which has been submitted to members of the council for their perusal, the UN calls on Israel to return the prisoners to the territory of the Palestinian Authority and to withdraw its forces from Jericho. The radio quoted UN diplomats as predicting that Qatar's new text of will also be rejected because the US will veto it. Israel Radio reported that US Representative to the UN Ambassador John Bolton last night walked out of the council meeting and it was clear that no presidential declaration would be issued, because such a declaration has to be adopted unanimously.

The media reported that a wave of attacks on foreigners in the territories took place as a result of the Israeli raid, with armed PFLP gunmen kidnapping at least 10 journalists and aid workers and vandalizing offices linked to the US and UK. Most of the abducted foreigners have been released. The media reported that the reactions in Western capitals and media to the IDF operation in Jericho were fairly positive.

Yediot quoted Serge Brammertz, the Belgian prosecutor leading the UN investigation into the assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafiq Hariri, as saying in a report to the Security Council that he was moving closer to a "unifying theory" of the blast that killed Hariri. Yediot reported that Syrian President Bashar Assad and his Deputy Farouk Shara, Syria's former FM, will be questioned by a UN inquiry team within a month. Yediot reported that the EU paid 15 million Euros that the PA owed the Israeli fuel company Dor Alon.

Ha'aretz reported that US medical instruments and supplies giant Stryker is on the verge of signing a deal to acquire Israeli company Sightline Technologies for USD 150 million.

The Jerusalem Post printed a paid ad issued by AmConGen Frankfurt -- a pre-solicitation notice for the issuance of a request for proposal for the construction of a new annex building at AmConGen Jerusalem.

Israel's Jericho Operation:

Summary:

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Abu Mazen is gradually losing the vestiges of support he had in the West."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "One side was as determined to bring the murderers to justice as the other was to set them free."

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot: "Tuesday's operation in Jericho was a message that was being delivered to a specific address. The message was: Don't break agreements because you'll pay dearly for it. The address was the Hamas extremists."

Political parties correspondent Yossi Verter wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The [Israeli] public likes leaders who show diplomatic moderation and military toughness, who return land and kill Arabs." Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "The swift and quiet operation in Jericho would not have been ordered were it not for the elections. Not our elections -- theirs [the Palestinians']."

Block Quotes:

I. "Jericho First"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 15): "Tuesday's operation was a second test of Ehud Olmert's performance as acting prime minister. The first, the evacuation of Amona, left a few question marks in its wake. Tuesday's events unfolded without a hitch.... The results are good for Kadima. The voters like

operations of this kind, in which the enemy is humiliated and our troops return safely to their bases. But the impact could very well either die out in a day or, even worse, could fly back in Kadima's face like a boomerang if a new wave of lethal terrorism begins. The impression is that the impact of Tuesday's events was felt in a far more palpable manner on Abu Mazen's regime.... Abu Mazen is gradually losing the vestiges of support he had in the West. The inclination in the European Union is to terminate all projects in the Palestinian Authority. His request, to be given a six-month extension to get rid of Hamas, has not been met with great support. His coffers are empty. On Tuesday, when the clashes were underway in Jericho, he was off in Europe. That happens to him quite often. He is a tragic figure. Regretfully, the tragedy is not only his; it is ours as well."

II. "Justice in Jericho"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 15): "The PA requirement to extradite terrorist suspects to Israel under the Oslo Accords was never implemented, so Israel never had an opportunity to try [Israeli cabinet minister Rehavam] Zeevi's killers.... For Israelis, the idea of the Palestinian assassins on the loose was unacceptable. For the Palestinians, particularly the incoming Hamas government, the prospect of the killers, who for many of them are heroes, remaining behind bars was unthinkable. One side was as determined to bring the murderers to justice as the other was to set them free.... The cult of terror has not lost its grip on Palestinian society, and the rise of Hamas portends, if anything, its comeback. But all this is not just Israel's problem, as the reaction to the IDF operation indicates. Even before the standoff ended, citizens from the US, Australia, Switzerland, South Korea and other countries were kidnapped in Gaza, and the EU and British Council headquarters were torched. So we return to the new Islamist formula: if you protest, ridicule or fight back against our violence, we will become more violent and accuse you of aggression. Not only does the cult of suicide bombings continue, but added to it is the use of rampant violence to intimidate the West."

III. "Don't Mess With Us"

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot (March 15): "Tuesday's operation in Jericho was a message that was being delivered to a specific address. The message was: Don't break agreements because you'll pay dearly for it. The address was the Hamas extremists.... This aggressive message will trickle down deeply. It already has. The Hamas leadership is comprised of people who know how to interpret Israeli actions -- to interpret and to fear.... The operation in the Jericho jail will strengthen the moderates in Hamas and the Palestinian Authority and will weaken the extremists. As such, it will also strengthen Abu Mazen." Because what will Abu Mazen say to Hamas?.... You achieved the humiliation of the Palestinian security forces and a military and public relations victory for Israel."

IV. "'Give Back Territory and Kill Arabs'"

Political parties correspondent Yossi Verter wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 15): "'To return territory and kill Arabs' is a favorite expression of the 'ranch forum' of Ariel Sharon's advisers.... The [Israeli] public likes leaders who show diplomatic moderation and military toughness, who return land and kill Arabs. Sharon followed the rule during his five-year reign, and his heir-apparent, Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, will do the same..... Kadima's strategists could not have wished for a more successful operation only a day before the pollsters began their work for the weekend papers. This week's polls are critical: if Kadima's slide can be halted at 37 or 38 Knesset seats less than two weeks before the election, then there will be a general sense that the battle has been won. If it was only up to the advisers, they would have given the green light for the Jericho operation next week.... Sharon promised, Olmert kept the promise. If that's not passing on the baton, then what is? Now we must wait and see whether Kadima restrains itself, or whether it uses images from the Jericho operation in its election broadcasts."

V. "Rehavam Zeevi's Legacy"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (March 15): "There isn't a single government in Israel, perhaps with the exception

of one formed by Yossi Beilin, that would not have done what the Olmert government did on Tuesday. That is something that both Binyamin Netanyahu and Amir Peretz would have to admit. The swift and quiet operation in Jericho would not have been ordered were it not for the elections. Not our elections -- theirs [the Palestinians']. The rise of Hamas to power turned the tables, reshuffled the deck and broke all the rules.... This veer by Olmert to the Right did not begin on Tuesday -- the interviews he gave over the weekend, his revised plans for the future with the Palestinians, the need for national reconciliation, for engaging in internal dialogue, for bolstering the settlement blocs, the visit to Ariel.... Still, a warning needs to be aired: In our region, in our condition, euphoria often ends in catastrophe. Hizbullah is still planning to set the north ablaze, the intelligence warnings keep on piling up, and the potential for explosive complications still exist. The most formidable enemy facing Ehud Olmert was and remains time."

JONES